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Jesse James in Iowa

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in Jonathan K. Cooper-Wiele's book, the first book-length study of the Battle of Athens (pronounced "Ay-thens") in Clark County in north-eastern Missouri.

The book is the result of a lifetime's fascination and study by the author, who first visited the battle site in 1962 at the age of eight and returned many times after. Cooper-Wiele's research is extensive, ranging from the standard Civil War sources to interviews with local people who are familiar with the town and the battle. The result is local history at its best, complete with fascinating participants, a good account of the brutal nature of the war in Missouri, and a thorough explanation of the author's methodology. Iowa's role, especially that of the town of Keokuk and the participation by Iowa troops in the battle, is critical and makes this book a must for Iowans.

I have published two books with Clark Kenyon's Camp Pope Bookshop and heartily endorse every word of Cooper-Wiele's praise for Kenyon's skill as an editor and publisher. He is an Iowa treasure, and this book is one more example of why.

Jesse James in Iowa, by John Koblas. St. Cloud, MN: North Star Press, 2006. xi, 211 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$14.95 paper.

Reviewer Peter Hoehnle is project manager, Iowa Valley Resource Conservation and Development. His research, writing, and teaching have focused on communal societies and all aspects of Iowa history.

The story told in John Koblas's book, *Jesse James in Iowa*, is a tale of murder, thievery, and a notorious American outlaw. Koblas traces the exploits of Jesse James (1847–1882) as the outlaw's area of operation encompassed the Hawkeye State in the 1860s and 1870s.

Koblas has written prolifically on James and on western history topics primarily for a younger audience. His accounts of the James Gang's activity in Iowa are engaging and should appeal to readers who are interested in James and western lore. Copious footnotes demonstrate that he mined newspapers, court documents, memoirs, and county histories for his account, which discounts some popular misconceptions about the James Gang's activity in the state.

The chief weakness of the book is a lack of focus. A lengthy chapter is devoted to the so-called Honey War between Iowa and Missouri in 1839. What impact that dispute had on James and company is not explained; the event appears to be included simply because it makes for a good story. Until bound by the strict chronology of James's robberies in Iowa, Koblas wanders through Iowa and Missouri history,

the background of Jesse James, and the lives of other western figures, such as Wyatt Earp, who shared an Iowa connection. The accounts are compelling but disjointed. Some anecdotes about James are related in more than one place in the book, as is a lengthy quotation from James's nemesis, detective Allan Pinkerton.

Koblas reaches his stride when he provides detailed narratives of three robberies attributed to the James Gang in or near Iowa. The first of these was the 1871 robbery of the bank at Corydon, Iowa, while most of the townspeople were away listening to orator Henry Clay Dean. The second was the daytime robbery of a train near Adair in 1873, which, Koblas notes, was not the first train robbery in the West, as is often stated. The third incident involves James's escape through Iowa following the robbery of the bank at Northfield, Minnesota, in 1876. Koblas's meticulous research suggests that little new information remains to be uncovered about these events.

This book represents careful research but, unfortunately, less careful editing. An entertaining read, its lack of focus and historical contextualization and perspective limit its effectiveness.

Creating Minnesota: A History from the Inside Out, by Annette Atkins. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2007. xvi, 319 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, timeline, index. \$27.95 cloth.

Reviewer Patrick Nunnally, research associate, University of Minnesota, coordinates the Telling River Stories project, which tells stories of how people have shaped the Mississippi River and been shaped by it.

Annette Atkins undertakes a brave foray into the often undervalued field of state history. What identifies the distinctive characteristics of a particular state? Is there anything that marks an Iowan, say, from a Minnesotan or a South Dakotan? Recent historical scholarship has tended not to concern itself with questions such as these, focusing instead on smaller or larger aggregations of population, or on groups defined in ways other than political geography. But Atkins makes a compelling case that close examination of a state's history can indeed be illustrative of many aspects of that state's past that remain important in the present. If, ultimately, her book is not fully satisfactory for all readers, that isn't because it is poorly written or sloppily thought out.

The notion that there can be an "inside out" to Minnesota history, presumes, of course, that there's an "outside in." For Atkins, the traditional biases of state history toward a "march of progress" narrative emphasizing political and economic triumphs unduly narrow the